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Quiet remembrance for WWII survivors Opening ceremony in Washington today for Japanese American memorial

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In a historic event, the U.S. Army's top general and a San Jose congressman who both experienced racial injustice during World War II will be honored guests at today's opening in Washington of a national memorial to the bitter Japanese American experience during that conflict.

Mike Honda, the freshman representative who turned 60 this week, and Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki, who is a year younger, were classified as enemy aliens during the war. Honda and his family spent his preschool years uprooted and interned by the federal government with about 120,000 other Japanese Americans in camps scattered across the West.

Now the two men are national figures, Honda as one of five members of Congress of Japanese descent and Shinseki as the first Asian American army chief.

Honda, a Democrat elected last November, says despite his family's World War II ordeal, he never lost his love of America.

"Even though there were mistakes made, it's still a country with principles at its core that are worth fighting for, but we have to work at it all the time, show eternal vigilance," said Honda, who will be joined today by family and a few close friends from San Jose.

The government forced Honda's parents, who were sharecroppers in the Stockton area, to give up everything and move into re-

mote camps surrounded with barbed wire and gun emplacements.

Yet, he said, "Here I am in Congress now. . . . You have to get involved and participate. That's what I've learned. If the promise is out there, you've got to take advantage of it."

The National Japanese American Memorial sits on a triangular piece of federal land just a few blocks north of the U.S. Capitol near the tourist-jammed National Mall. It honors the civilians and the thousands of Japanese Americans who served their country in the military as volunteers, even though their family and friends were in internment camps.

To Alan Teruya, a national board member of the Japanese American Citizens League from the East Bay, the rise of Shinseki to head the same Army that helped round up Japanese Americans during the war is striking.

"We've come full circle . . ." he said. "In terms of the consciousness of the American people, things that were done before are unthinkable today. People of color are much more assimilated into the mainstream."

A \$10 MILLION PROJECT

The serene \$10 million memorial, which includes a sculpture of two cranes snared in barbed wire, a nearby pool and waterfall and quotations and a poem by a San Mateo woman etched into granite, was financed by gifts from about 20,000 donors.

The contributions ranged from \$8 to \$500,000, said Cherry Tsutsumida, the 67-year-old leader of the foundation whose family was uprooted from its home in the small farming community of Guadalupe in Santa Barbara County in late 1941 and sent to internment camps.

Her farmer-father's spirit was broken by the war experience, by being forced to give up everything he had worked for as his family was interned, she said. "Like so many men of that period, he was stoic, but he really suffered --

depression, alcoholism," she said. "My father never recovered."

The foundation is still raising money, this time to pay for a continuing education program to teach visitors about the constant danger to civil liberties arising from the public's fear of strangers, even fellow citizens.

"We Japanese must make sure it doesn't happen to anyone else," Tsutsumida said.

LIFE IN POETRY

The five-line poem in the tanka format was written by Akemi Dawn Ehrlich of San Mateo, who won a national competition to have her words included in the memorial.

"It feels pretty amazing. I don't have anything published, but now I'm published in granite," said Ehrlich, who was born after the war, but whose mother was interned in Arkansas.

Her poem, "Legacy," is brief and to the point:

"Japanese by blood

Hearts and minds American

With honor unbowed

Bore the sting of injustice

For future generations."

One Bay Area man with truly remarkable World War II experiences is Harry Fukuhara, an 81-year-old retired U.S. Army colonel who lives in San Jose.

He was born in Seattle in 1920, but was taken to Japan as a boy after his father died. His mother settled with her four boys in Hiroshima. The bilingual Fukuhara returned to the United States in 1938 and worked as a houseboy in Los Angeles.

After Pearl Harbor was attacked, he was interned, then was recruited into the Military Intelligence Service, working as a translator and interpreter in the Pacific theater. His brothers, meanwhile, were in the Japanese military.

"The Army put us in the camps, and (the) Army got us out," he recalled.

In August 1945 came word that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. Fukuhara managed to get himself assigned to a unit headed for Japanese occupation duty and made his way to Hiroshima. He found his mother and brothers alive, although one brother died not much later from radiation sickness, followed by his mother a few years ago.

PROUD TO HAVE SERVED

Even though he was whipsawed by his war experience, Fukuhara said he was proud to serve the U.S. military.

Looking at the memorial and his own experiences, the colonel said he had learned something.

"You can't just take things for granted," Fukuhara said. "You've got to stick up for things you think are right.

"The monument is very important. The education that follows it is the most important part. If we don't tell the story over and over, it won't mean anything."

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